

Finding Quality Child Care

A Step-by-Step Guide for Kansas Families

Created by the
**Kansas Head Start
Collaboration Office**

STEP 1: Identify your options



Choosing the right care for your child is a decision. Experts have shown that high-quality early care and education services help children succeed later in school. Knowing how to choose a quality child care provider can be a difficult task. Fortunately, there are resources available to help families make informed choices about child care.

To learn what child care options are available in your area, a good place to start is Child Care Aware of Kansas. Visit the web site at www.ks.childcareaware.org or call 785-823-3343 (855-750-3343 toll free) to find out what child care options are available in your area.

STEP 2: Consider what works best for your family



There are many different child care settings, from private homes to large centers. Depending on the age, personality and needs of your child, one style of care may be a better fit than others. Here are a few of the most common types.

Licensed Day Care Home

One provider caring for a maximum of 10 children under the age of 16 in the provider's home. The total number of children in care at any one time is based on the ages of the children in care.

Group Day Care Home

Two providers caring for a maximum of 12 children under 16 years of age in the provider's home. The total number of children in care at any one time is based on the ages of the children in care.

Child Care Centers

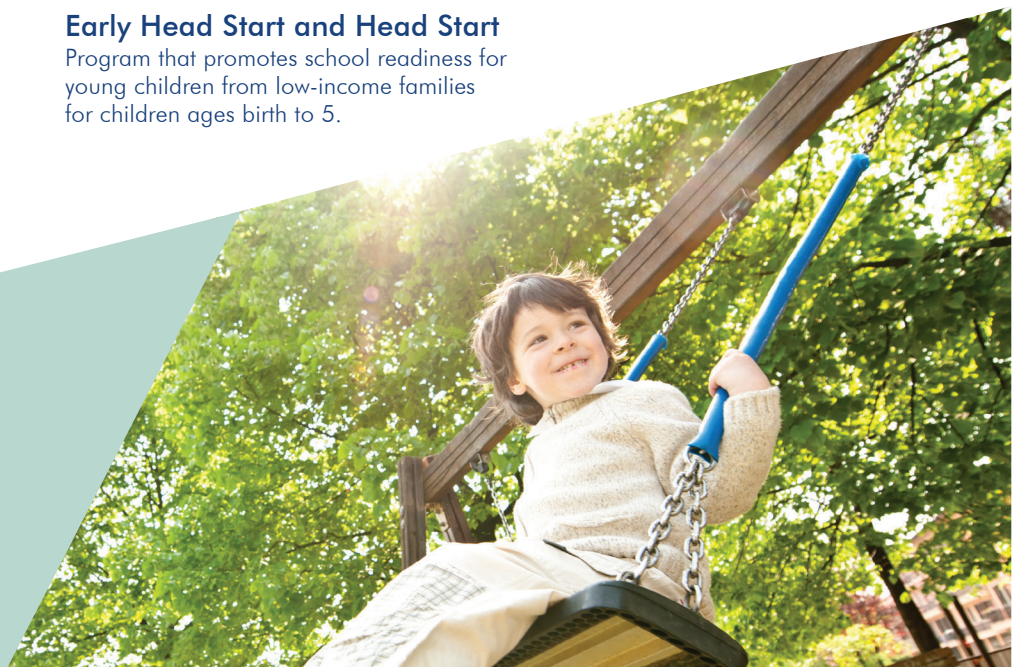
A child care facility that provides educational activities for 13 or more children under the age of 16. Centers may provide day time and evening care, as well as before and after school care for school age children.

Preschool Programs

Programs that provide learning experiences for children ages 3 to 5. A preschool may have fewer than 13 children. Staff-to-child ratios must be maintained at all times.

Early Head Start and Head Start

Program that promotes school readiness for young children from low-income families for children ages birth to 5.



STEP 3: Determine your budget



Most families will also need to factor in the cost of child care before selecting a provider. The cost of care will vary depending on the age of your child and the type of child care setting you are considering. To begin thinking about your budget, Child Care Aware offers an online calculator: <http://childcareaware.org/families/paying-for-child-care/budgeting-your-child-care-options/>

Based on your income, family size and other factors, you may qualify for financial assistance, reduced fees or free tuition. These include but are not limited to:

- ▶ Head Start or State-funded pre-K programs;
- ▶ Child Care Subsidy through The Kansas Department for Children and Families (for low-income families, teen parents completing their education and families receiving TANF; in most cases, children must be younger than 13);
- ▶ Military Fee Assistance (through Child Care Aware) or military discounts;
- ▶ Tax breaks (the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit);
- ▶ On-site child care provided by an employer or educational institution;
- ▶ Sliding fee scales and/or sibling discounts through a care provider;
- ▶ Scholarships from local non-profits or providers;
- ▶ Child care programs at the YMCA, Boys & Girls Club, or church/religious organization.

STEP 4: Do your research



Whether you have an opportunity to visit each provider in person, or conduct most of your research by phone or online, there are questions that should be asked about staff, programming and facilities.

A good place to start your research is the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, which maintains a database of licensed programs throughout the state and whether they meet health and safety standards. You can check a program's licensing history and see any substantial complaints or non-compliance issues, online at: www.kdheks.gov/bccl/capp.htm

In addition, before enrolling your child with a care provider you will want to find out the following general information:

GROUP SIZE

What is the adult-to-child ratio? Are kids supervised at all times?

STAFF BACKGROUND

What health and safety training do caregivers receive? Have background checks been performed for all staff members? Is there a high rate of staff turnover?

ACTIVITIES AND EQUIPMENT

Are there spaces for indoor and outdoor play? Is the facility equipped to provide developmentally-appropriate activities for various ages? What does an average day look like is there a balance of play, learning, and rest?

PROVIDER POLICIES

How does the facility handle discipline, nutrition, transportation safety, and emergency preparedness (including pediatric first aid and CPR)? Have all staff members been trained in safe sleep practices? Do you agree with your provider's approach?

For an in-depth list of questions to ask and criteria to consider, visit Child Care Aware: www.ks.childcareaware.org/for-parents-families/questions-ask/



STEP 5: Ask for a contract



If your preferred provider has space available for your child, ask for a contract that clearly states rates and fees; schedule (including vacation/holidays); sick child policies; which adults have permission to pick up your child; and disenrollment procedures. These and other details may also be covered in a parent handbook or other statement of policies and procedures.

STEP 6: Stay involved



Volunteering is a great way to stay involved in your child's care. Ask your provider about coming in to read a story or joining the class for a field trip or other activity.

If you can't spend time in person, request regular updates from your provider about the program and your child's progress. At the same time, check in with your child. Does he/she like their caregivers? Is he/she learning and having fun?

STEP 7: Troubleshooting



In some communities, child care options and availability may not meet demand. What happens if you start your search early, follow all the steps listed above, and still can't find an appropriate care provider?

- ▶ Try a different location. If you've been looking near home, check for places near work, or on your commute.
- ▶ Get on the waiting list at every program that could work for you.
- ▶ Talk to friends, neighbors and people in your community (church, library, work).
- ▶ Make a short-term plan. Is there a friend or relative who could help?
- ▶ Keep checking with your Child Care Resource & Referral specialist for new opportunities.
- ▶ Use Child Care Aware's Stay at Home or Return to Work

Decision-Making Tool:

<http://childcareaware.org/families/payng-for-child-care/stay-at-home-or-return-to-work/>

